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SUBJECT: TBILISI UPDATE: 11/30/07

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Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Saakashvili Accused of Misusing Administrative Resources

¶11. (U) Opposition parties accused Mikheil Saakashvili of misusing administrative resources for political campaign purposes after he met with Abkhaz Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) on November 28 at a Tbilisi Municipality building. Tbilisi Mayor Gigi Ugulava and Minister for Refugees and Accommodations Kova Subelian were present at the televised meeting. Saakashvili instructed both officials present to hand over state-owned property occupied by IDPs to the occupants. Saakashvili said if he is elected, he will return the IDPs within months in "safety and dignity" to Abkhazia. New Rightists party member Mamuka Katsitadze said Saakashvili's instructions to government officials, when he is no longer president, are inappropriate and constitute a misuse of administrative resources.

Khaindrava Discusses Election with Ambassador

¶12. (C) On November 29, Goga Khaindrava, opposition politician and member of the United National Council of Opposition (UNC), met with the Ambassador. He said opposition election campaigns are being hindered by a limit on the amount of funds that can be withdrawn from personal bank accounts. He also said business owners, especially road construction companies, are being summoned to the National Movement Party offices to "encourage" a contribution to the campaign.

¶13. (C) Khaindrava reiterated opposition party complaints of unfair distribution of air time by TV companies in favor of Saakashvili. With Imedi TV remaining off air, Khaindrava said the opposition has no access to television coverage except Kavkasia, which has coverage limited to Tbilisi. He said while Saakashvili's entire meeting with IDPs was broadcast, the opposition only received 2 minutes of coverage of their campaign activities. Central Election Commission (CEC) Chairman Levan Tarkhnishvili said equal time will be provided after all candidates are officially registered.

¶14. (C) Khaindrava said UNC candidate Levan Gachechiladze was not going to withdraw his candidacy in favor of Badri Patarkatsishvili. He said Gachechiladze did visit Badri recently in London, but his primary reason was to visit his children studying there. Khaindrava said he too planned to meet with Badri, but added Badri is not a realistic candidate for president. Khaindrava said Badri is using the campaign to return to Georgia, since he cannot be indicted if he is a candidate.

GOG Seeks Clarity about Imedi Ownership, Michnik Arrives

¶5. (U) National Security Council Secretary Alexander (Kakha) Lomaia told the press, "we really want Imedi back on air and we are doing everything in our power to make it happen," but he could not give an exact date. Lomaia and PM Lado Gurgenidze met with Martin Pompadur, executive vice-president of News Corp, over the weekend to discuss Imedi's ownership and financial status. On November 29 the Tbilisi City Court sanctioned a Finance Ministry probe into Imedi. Gurgenidze called the government's request to have access to Imedi's financial records reasonable. At the OSCE Ministerial Council in Madrid, FM Gela Bezhushvili told reporters the Imedi TV problem will be resolved "through compromise." Polish media ombudsman Adam Michnik arrived November 29 in Tbilisi and met with opposition representatives and Imedi TV journalists in an attempt to mediate a solution to the closure of Imedi, help ensure media freedom, and watch for violations of journalistic ethics.

Election Campaigns in Full Swing

¶6. (U) After the final tally, the CEC announced three presidential candidates were disqualified for failing to provide adequate documentation, bringing the final number to nineteen. Each candidate must now submit 50,000 signatures to support their candidacy and have their name put on the ballot. New Rightists candidate Davit Gamkrelidze launched his campaign November 29. He said he would meet with Abkhaz

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leader Sergey Bagapsh in Sokhumi to assure him Georgia would not seek a forceful resolution to the conflict in Abkhazia. Gamkrelidze also said that, if elected, he would reduce defense spending and immediately demand the withdrawal of Russian peacekeeping forces from the conflict zones. Labor Party candidate Shalva Natelashvili launched his election campaign November 29, promising free education and medical care, a stipend of GEL 1000 for each newborn child, and halving the cost of gas, electricity and water. UNC candidate Levan Gachechiladze said he will launch his campaign December 3. On the same day Badri Patarkatsishvili opened his campaign headquarters in Batumi and appointed a campaign chair.

TEFFT